CHRONICLE AND COMMENT

By ARTHUR BARTLETT MAURICE

NOW that the teacup tempest—in a sense it was literally that—stirred by Clare Sheridan's alleged interview with Rudyard Kipling at Bateman's, Burwash, in which certain remarks not exactly complimentary to the United States were attributed to the host, has died down, it seems time for intelligent Americans to consider the whole matter from the point of view of good natured common sense, and to draw from it a useful lesson. As Mr. Kipling has denied giving the interview and repudiated the sentiments ascribed to him, that completely closes one aspect of the case. Mr. Kipling has never lacked courage. We do not recall that he has ever denied, or attempted speciously to explain why, as, for example, Thackeray attempted speciously to explain away a certain passage in the opening chapter of "The Newcomes," what was meant to be read in the lines, as well as between the lines, of "The Truce of the Bear," or "The White Man's Burden," or "The Rhyme of the Three Captains," or "France."

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THE real significance of the affair was not in what Mr. Kipling was alleged to have said. That, even before the flat denial, was relatively of little importance. What was of real importance was the reception of the cabled statement in this country. Utterance, Senatorial and editorial, betrayed a strange and uncomfortable lack of self-control. To borrow a line from the familiar Kipling poem, it was "inopportune, shrill-accented." It suggested the heart, leaping, "as a babe's, at little things." It served to justify what has always been regarded as the rather absurd portrait of Wilton Sargent, American, of "An Error in the Fourth Dimension." Some years ago Katherine Fullerton Gerould wrote an article that was widely quoted called "The Amazing Rightness of Mr. Kipling." Was he right again in the remarks that were attributed to him? Then there were the many letters to the newspapers revealing a surprising ignorance of Kipling's work—the appalling ignorance of the "discoverer," who imparts the information that Mr. Kipling made such and such a statement in the course of a book called "American Notes."

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IN the heat of controversy certain little touches in the alleged interview which stirred up all the trouble seem to have been entirely overlooked. For example, no one has pointed out that Clare Sheridan began her account of the interview with a misquotation of "Sussex," which is the finest Kipling poem since "The True Romance," if not the finest he has ever written. Then some one certainly should have recalled Kipling's arraignment of American journalism in what he considered its elementary stage of exaggerated sensationalism in the highly humorous story "A Matter of Fact," in which the American journalist Kellor, having witnessed in an upheaval of South Atlantic waters the death of the sea serpent and the agony of its mate, "blind, white and smelling of musk," realizes to his dismay that it is impossible to dispose of what should be the greatest beat in newspaper history, and that the only way that the truth can be told is in the form of the fiction which he regards with the contempt of the real journalist.

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SUPPOSE that Mr. Kipling had made the remarks that were ascribed to him. Suppose in the course of a long talk which he supposed to be confidential he had said that we have "got the gold of the world" and that the real America "died in 1860." In the printed page these statements glare. But what of the context which may have given the words an entirely different meaning? Nor is the context a mere matter of other words. Three thousand-odd miles away the reader sees the condemning words, but he does not see the possible twinkle of the myopic gray eyes behind the thick glasses or the raising of the shaggy thatch eyebrow. Many years ago Mr. Jesse Lynch Williams, then a reporter on the NEW YORK SUN, wrote an exceedingly ingenious story called "The Great Secretary of State Interview." The cub reporter, who was the inevitable hero of a newspaper story of that period, failed to see the smile or understand the intonation which accompanied the great man's words: "The Administration would give Mr. So and So the strongest support it possibly *could* give." The experienced reporters recognized the significance of the smile and the emphasis upon the word "could" and their wisdom brought downfall.

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BUT it is with the purely literary aspect of the Kipling controversy that THE NEW YORK HERALD book section is principally concerned. What Mr. Kipling may have said with qualifications uttered or implied in a talk that he regarded as confidential is one thing. What has gone forth to the world in his books is another. The printed page is a fair target for attack. Mr. Kipling, from the day in the late eighteen eighties when he discovered San Francisco, has rapped us joyously and frequently. The real American of patriotic impulses, the kind who believes that when traveling in Europe patriotism to the flag is best expressed not by blatant aggressiveness but by quiet courtesy to, and consideration for, others, by conforming to the customs of the country visited, and by adopting a Mark Tapleyan spirit, likes him not one whit the less for it. That kind of American recognizes the cynic humor that has inspired the rapping, and does not look behind for motives of envy or hate that are not there. Also he knows in his heart of hearts that if the day ever comes that sees the republic in dire peril, with the waking of "the drumming guns that have no doubts"—no voice is likely to ring so loudly in championship of all that is fine and sound in America as the voice of Rudyard Kipling.

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TWO months ago there was published in the book section an article entitled "The United States of Rudyard Kipling," which attempted to show the various parts of the country which had been used as backgrounds for Kipling stories. A reader of the section, residing in Chicago, wrote, rather high-handedly it seemed, condemning the article as one exceedingly discourteous to Mr. Kipling. Certainly no discourtesy was intended, and no one except the writer of the letter seems to have found any such discourtesy. The writer considered particularly objectionable a paragraph which pictured the young Kipling of twenty-two or twenty-three, carrying a grudge based upon his dislike for the then inadequate copyright laws, into all his investigations of San Francisco. That statement our correspondent called something like "libelously inaccurate." But take Kipling's own words: "This may sound bloodthirsty, but, remember, I had a grievance upon me—the grievance of the pirated English books." And again: "Oliver Wendell Holmes says that the Yankee schoolmarm, the cider and the salt codfish of the Eastern States are responsible for what he calls a nasal accent. I know better. They stole books from across the water without paying for 'em, and the snort of delight was fixed in their nostrils forever by a just Providence. That is why they talk a foreign tongue to-day."

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IN "His Private Honor," one of the early tales involving "Soldiers Three," there is a line which goes far beyond innuendo. It reads: "Ortheris, being neither a menial nor an American, had no excuse for yelping." The villain of "The Ballad of Fultah Fisher's Boarding House" was pure American. "And there was Salem Hardiecker, a lean Bostonian he." Then there is the aforementioned "A Matter of Fact," telling of the sea serpent. "Keller tripled-headed his account, talked about 'our gallant captain' and wound up with an allusion to American enterprise in that it was a citizen of Dayton, Ohio, that had seen the sea serpent. This sort of thing would have discredited the Creation, much more a mere sea tale, but as a specimen of the picture-writing of a half civilized people it was very interesting." The English journalist of the tale comments: "Don't be an ass, Keller. Remember, I'm seven hundred years your senior, and what your grandchildren may learn five hundred years hence I learned from my grandfathers about five hundred years ago. You won't do it, because you can't."

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IN the exuberance of youth the Kipling of thirty-odd years ago paid his tribute to various American cities besides New York which moved him to his famous expression, "What heavenly loot!" in paraphrase of old Blucher's "*Was fur plunder!*" "San Francisco is a mad city, inhabited for the most part by perfectly insane people, whose women are of a remarkable beauty." Of Chicago: "I have struck a city—a real city—and they call it Chicago. . . . . Having seen it, I urgently desire never to see it again. It is inhabited by savages." He made the "American language" a butt as joyously and irresponsibly as any English music hall comedian. "The American has no language. He is dialect, slang, accent," and so forth. Later in "The Naulakha," which he wrote in collaboration with an American, the late Wolcott Balestier, he makes the Maharajah say of the American hero, Tarvin: "Thy friend here speaks such English as I never knew." Later on he alludes to the "irresponsible race who stride booted into the council halls of kings and demand concessions for oil boring from Araccan to Peshun," which is merely prose expression of

Or sombre-drunk, at mine or mart,
He dubs his dreary brethren kings.

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THEN there is "A Walking Delegate," in which in the guise of a Vermont farmer, Kipling endeavored to distinguish between the various types from various parts of the country. Marcus Aurelius Antoninus and most of the horses on the farm reflect something of the domesticity of gray New England. There are also strangers. State and city pride is prevalent. The city element is represented in Muldoon, the ex-car horse, born in Iowa, but a typical New Yorker, swearing by the city of his adoption. "Any horse dat knows beans gits outer Kansas before dey crips his shoes. De Belt Line stables ain't no Hoffman House, but dere Vanderbilt's 'longside ef Kansas." There is Tweezy, a type of the old South, ever the most courteous of horses, loyal to his allegiance to the Blue Grass region of Kentucky. "Excuse me, suh, but unless I have been misinfohmed, most of yo' prominent siahs, suh, are impo'ted from Kentucky, and *I'm* from Paduky." Then there is the blatant Boney from Kansas with his: "Kansas, sir, needs no advertisement. Native sons rely on themselves and their sires. What the horses of Kansas think to-day the horses of America will think to-morrow."

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IN similar vein much might be cited from a score of other tales and poems. But it is only the very limited mind that finds in these citations any evidence of underlying hostility. "The Islanders," which arraigns "the flanneled fools at the wicket and the foolish oafs at the goals," and "The English Flag" cannot be construed as reflecting a dislike on the part of Kipling for his own land. Behind the most vigorous attack upon American institutions there has always been a kind of mental kinship with the people of the United States. The personal Kipling—though perhaps he may not relish the statement—is much more of an American, apart from his political beliefs, than he is an Englishman. His manner of speech is more American than it is English, which does not mean that he talks through his nose, or drops into the idioms used by Wilton Sargent in irritating moments of "An Error in the Fourth Dimension." He has perhaps been a little cocky at times in his manner of rapping us over the knuckles, but the fact is that he hits upon an occasional truth. Even the criticisms conveyed in the alleged interview, which he has denied, furnish food for serious thought. The professional patriot may foam at the mouth, but it is the professional patriot and his brethren who are the real enemies of the Republic; not Mr. Kipling, who has always fought in the open.

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ALFRED A. KNOPF, INC., has just brought out the first volume of a new edition in English of the works of Guy de Maupassant, the translations being made by Mr. Ernest Boyd. So far Maupassant in English has not been a conspicuous success. Taught to write by Flaubert, who was an exacting taskmaster, he took the word he needed to express his meaning, and very often that word was one that flustered the timid or squeamish translator. There is in existence a paper covered translation of "Bel-Ami," in which not merely words but entire episodes are missing, with the result that the story is utterly unintelligible. There is an English edition of Maupassant, sold by subscription, very elaborate as to binding, but so distorted that it is not Maupassant at all. To illustrate, take the story "Mouche." The philosophy of that tale, all its mordant irony, is summed up in five words. Translated into highly proper English, the words mean absolutely nothing.

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ALSO, to put the matter bluntly, the average American who claims acquaintance with the work of Guy de Maupassant bases the claim first upon his knowledge of H. C. Bunner's very clever adaptations in "Made in France," in which Bunner did not mutilate the original, but retold the tales with what he called a "United States twist"; secondly upon his knowledge of "La Parure" (The Necklace), which is to be found in every text book on the short story as the supreme example of the art of condensation, and, thirdly, on the familiar glib comparisons of Maupassant's work with the work of Edgar Allan Poe and O. Henry. To turn to the cinder path for a figure of speech, the average American reader knows Maupassant as a highly efficient performer at the literary 100 yard dash. But "Une Vie," and "Pierre et Jean," and "Fort Comme la Mort," and "Bel-Ami," and "Mont Oriol," and "Notre Cœur" attest his ability to run the mile, while he was probably at his very best at the 440, to which distance belong such tales as "Monsieur Parent," "L'Heritage" and "La Maison Tellier."

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LITERARY history is rich in intriguing mysteries. Will any one ever write the real story of what happened during the last four or five days of Edgar Allan Poe's life? Is the true reason of Thackeray's death ever likely to become common knowledge? In the case of Guy de Maupassant, who was the lady in the pearl gray dress, and what was the secret of the sinister influence she exercised upon Maupassant's last tragic days of sanity? Maupassant died in 1893 at the madhouse of Dr. Blanche in a suburb of Paris. In 1911 there appeared a book about him written by Francois-Tassart, who from 1883 till 1893 had been the writer's valet. Francois told guardedly, but with bitter hatred, of the lady in the pearl gray dress. Maupassant had promised to spend Christmas Eve of 1891 with his mother at Nice. He did not go to Nice, but to the Isle Sainte-Marguerite with two ladies, one of them the mysterious lady in the pearl gray dress. Something happened during that journey—something weird and horrible—but what it was no one seems to know.

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PERHAPS the events of that journey merely hastened Maupassant's mental and physical downfall. The coming of

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